

at in a tax system that is riddled with special interest loopholes and in a country that is so divided and where the poor and the elderly are struggling compared to the people who are at the very top, who have basically gathered all of the economic benefit of our growth since the great recession.

So, for all of those reasons, I will be completely unable to support this person's confirmation. I am sorry because I would like to have seen the President make the slightest gesture in the direction of bipartisanship, the slightest gesture in the direction of compromise, the slightest gesture in the direction of reasonableness, but out of this White House, on the civilian Cabinet, we have seen nothing like that.

It is a Cabinet that is completely controlled by rightwing ideology and appalling special interests. Usually, the special interests are the most dangerous and worst special interests that the agency has to regulate. Instead of accepting that as the agency's responsibility, he has brought that special interest in, brought the fox into the henhouse. If there was ever a fox in the OMB henhouse to take our Social Security folks and our Medicare folks and hurt them, it is this Congressman.

I cannot accept his nomination. I will vote against it.

I yield the floor.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT). Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION RULE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise to speak on the potential repeal of the Social Security Administration's rule that helps keep guns out of the hands of those with a severe mental illness. I voted no.

First, I want to point out that this rule only addresses a shortcoming in the existing background check law that Congress passed legislation to address. We use the National Instant Criminal Background Check system to prevent criminals and the adjudicated mentally ill from purchasing firearms.

In order for the FBI to have access to all the data they need to run those background checks, Congress passed the NICS Improvement Act in 2007—in bipartisan fashion, signed into law by President George W. Bush, hardly a gun safety activist—to instruct Federal agencies to send information to the NICS system about criminal records and mental illness.

This rule at the Social Security Administration is simply implementing that bipartisan law.

Second, let me underscore the point, this rule only applies to those who

have severe mental health disorders, like schizophrenia. These are folks who, because of their disorder need assistance managing their own affairs and are so severely impaired that they cannot hold down a full-time job. It simply requires the Social Security Administration to pass that data on to the NICS background check system so the FBI can stop gun sales to the seriously mentally ill.

It doesn't get much more common sense than that.

Frankly, I find it absurd that the Republicans have chosen to repeal this rule as one of their first priorities in this Congress.

Does the Republican majority really think it is wise, as my colleague from Connecticut asked, that folks who are so severely mentally ill that they cannot work and require assistance managing their finances should be assumed to be able to responsibly own and protect a gun?

Mental illness is a serious topic. We have debated it many times in this body—how to better provide for treatment, how to decrease the stigma surrounding it—but I don't remember the part where we debated whether it was wise or not to allow folks with a severe, almost incapacitating, mental illness to easily purchase a gun.

Gun violence takes far too many lives each year. At the very, very least, we should be doing all that we can to prevent criminals, potential terrorists, and the adjudicated mentally ill from purchasing firearms; yet Republicans consistently line up behind the NRA to block or repeal policies that would do those things—even though 8 or 9 out of every 10 Americans supports them, though a vast majority of gunowners support them.

Whenever Republicans talk about gun violence, they say, "Let's enforce the laws on the books!" Well, as I mentioned, this regulation does just that; it implements the bipartisan 2007 NICS Improvement Act that Republican President George W. Bush signed into law.

Today, Republicans are calling their own bluff; they are not interested in enforcing the laws on the books—they just want to repeal them, even when that puts innocent American lives at risk.

If Republicans have a problem with this rule, they should have pushed the Social Security Administration to modify it, rather than repealing it outright and blocking any similar rule-making on the subject, which is what this CRA would do.

Thank you.

NOMINATION OF SCOTT PRUITT

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, after careful consideration, I have decided to oppose the confirmation of Scott Pruitt, the nominee for Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, EPA. I have met at length with Mr. Pruitt, who is an accomplished attor-

ney with considerable knowledge about environmental laws. We discussed many important environmental issues about which I care deeply—from EPA's enforcement of landmark environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, to climate change and the Clean Power Plan, to protections from harmful pollutants such as lead and mercury. I also have reviewed testimony from his confirmation hearing.

In keeping with my past practice, regardless of which party is in the White House, I will vote for cloture on his nomination so that every Senator can have a clear, up-or-down vote on this important nomination of a member of the President's Cabinet. But I will vote no on Mr. Pruitt's confirmation.

The fact is Mr. Pruitt and I have fundamentally different views of the role and mission of the EPA. That does not mean that I agree with every regulatory action that EPA has taken. At times, the Agency has been difficult to work with and unresponsive to bipartisan congressional concerns, but the EPA plays a vital role in implementing and enforcing landmark laws that protect not only our environment but also public health.

Specifically, I have significant concerns that Mr. Pruitt has actively opposed and sued EPA on numerous issues that are of great importance to the State of Maine, including mercury controls for coal-fired power plants and efforts to reduce cross-State air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. His actions leave me with considerable doubts about whether his vision for the EPA is consistent with the Agency's critical mission to protect human health and the environment.

The State of Maine, located at the end of our Nation's "air pollution tailpipe," is on the receiving end of pollution generated by coal-fired power plants in other States. Reducing harmful air pollutants is critical for public health, particularly for Maine, which has among the highest rates of asthma in the country. Controls for mercury, one of the most persistent and dangerous pollutants, are especially important for children and pregnant women. Moreover, there is no doubt that the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change pose a significant threat to our State's economy and our natural resources, from our working forests, fishing, and agricultural industries, to tourism and recreation.

The opposition to the nominee expressed by Friends of Acadia is grounded in concerns about the importance of emissions reductions for lessening the impacts of climate change that affect this gem of a national park. The changes we are already seeing in the aquatic life in Casco Bay and the Gulf of Maine, for example, are cause for alarm. The incidence of Lyme disease in northern Maine and high asthma rates throughout the State are also linked to environmental changes that threaten the health and well-being of too many Maine people.

These are among the reasons why I have voted to uphold the EPA rule governing mercury and air toxics standards from coal-fired power plants and the cross-State air pollution rule, as well as the Clean Power Plan to limit carbon pollution from existing and new fossil fuel-fired power plants.

I reject the false choice of pitting the environment against the economy because, for much of the State of Maine, the economy and the environment are inextricably linked. A strong commitment to protecting the health of our Nation's environment is critical for protecting Maine's natural beauty, the State's economy, and the health of those of us fortunate enough to call Maine home.

Due to my concerns about Mr. Prutt's commitment to the mission of the EPA, I will cast my vote in opposition to his confirmation.

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE U.S. NAVY SEABEES

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, today I wish to pay tribute to the U.S. Navy Construction Battalion, also known as the SeaBees, and congratulate them on their 75th anniversary. It was March 5th, 1942, when the SeaBees were charged by the Navy with the task of building, maintaining, and supporting base infrastructure in remote locations for the Navy and Marine Corps. SeaBees execute this critical mission, while also maintaining the capability to engage in combat operations.

For 75 years, the SeaBees have met challenges in times of war and peace. They have been deployed all over the world, contributing to our national security interests by constructing military bases, building airfields, roads, bridges, and even underwater structures. In every major operation our Nation has carried out, from World War II to present operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Navy SeaBees are there, demonstrating unmatched courage, strength, and professionalism. Their personal sacrifices are a testament to the dedication of the Navy's elite construction force.

As we honor the SeaBees today, let us not forget to acknowledge the many sacrifices their families have made throughout their 75 years. Whether at home or abroad in the more than 30 countries to which they deploy, it is the support of their families that enables the brave men and women of the SeaBees to accomplish their mission with the utmost devotion to duty, honor, and country. I am proud that Gulfport, MS, serves as home to the Naval Construction Battalion Center, where more than 12,500 SeaBees, sailors, airmen, and soldiers have received valuable training this past year alone.

We congratulate the U.S. Navy SeaBees on their 75th anniversary and reaffirm our commitment to them.

TRIBUTE TO ROSE ILES FEALY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize the hard work of my Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee intern Rose Iles Fealy. Rose hails from Perth, Western Australia, where she studies political science at the Australian National University.

While interning on the Commerce Committee, Rose has assisted the Consumer Protection, Product Safety, Insurance, and Data Security Subcommittee. Following her internship, Rose intends to pursue law school. I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Rose Iles Fealy for all of the fine work she has done for the committee and wish her continued success in the years to come.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING PIMENTEL & SONS GUITARMAKERS

• Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, it is an honor to join musicians and music lovers in recognizing Albuquerque's Pimentel family for their 65 years of building handcrafted instruments that are sought after by guitar players and collectors around the world.

Pimentel & Sons is a successful family-owned small business that was started from scratch and has been sustained with innovation, hard work, and a commitment to excellence.

As the ranking member on the Joint Economic Committee, I am proud to recognize successful entrepreneurs and small business owners like the Pimentels.

Lorenzo Pimentel learned the craft of building guitars as a teenager in Ciudad Juarez. After marrying his wife, Josefina, Lorenzo moved his family to Albuquerque after falling in love with the Sandia Mountains. Over his lifetime, Lorenzo Pimentel accumulated an incredible list of accolades for his guitars.

Four of Lorenzo's sons, Agustin, Ricardo, Roberto, and Victor, have continued their late father's work as master guitar makers in their own right. They have each played an integral role in shaping New Mexico's music scene for decades.

Pimentel & Sons has earned the Hispanic Heritage Month Distinguished Honor Award, the Governor's Award for Excellence and Achievement in the Arts, and an invitation to the Smithsonian Institute's Festival of American Folklife.

In 2009, Governor Bill Richardson signed a bill designating Pimentel's Sunrise model as the official State guitar of New Mexico.

Generations of musicians have played and appreciated the world-renowned Pimentel guitars that capture the spirit and culture of New Mexico. •

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 10:59 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by

Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 428. An act to survey the gradient boundary along the Red River in the States of Oklahoma and Texas, and for other purposes.

The message further announced that the House has agreed to the following concurrent resolution, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H. Con. Res. 23. Concurrent resolution providing for a joint session of Congress to receive a message from the President.

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

At 4:40 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bills:

H.R. 255. An act to authorize the National Science Foundation to support entrepreneurial programs for women.

H.R. 321. An act to inspire women to enter the aerospace field, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, through mentorship and outreach.

The enrolled bills were subsequently signed by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. WHITEHOUSE (for himself, Mr. COTTON, Mr. NELSON, and Ms. MURKOWSKI):

S. 379. A bill to amend title II of the Social Security Act to eliminate the five month waiting period for disability insurance benefits under such title for individuals with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. PETERS (for himself, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. DONNELLY, Mr. REED, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, and Mr. BROWN):

S. 380. A bill to amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to require the disclosure of the total number of the domestic and foreign employees of a company, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. GRASSLEY (for himself, Mrs. ERNST, and Mr. LEAHY):

S. 381. A bill to repeal the Act entitled "An Act to confer jurisdiction on the State of Iowa over offenses committed by or against Indians on the Sac and Fox Indian Reservation"; to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

By Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mr. RUBIO, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. MARKEY, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. DAINES, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. SCHUMER, Mr. MCCAIN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, and Mr. TESTER):

S. 382. A bill to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop a voluntary registry to collect data on cancer incidence among firefighters; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Ms. COLLINS (for herself, Mr. WARNER, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. PORTMAN, and Mr. MERKLEY):

S. 383. A bill to coordinate the provision of energy retrofitting assistance to schools; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.